

Message Text

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21

ACTION EA-10

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FM AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

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INFO AMCONSUL BRISBANE BY POUCH

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

CINCPAC HONOLULU

AMCONSUL PERTH BY POUCH

AMCONSUL SYDNEY

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, AS

SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM IN VIGOROUS ATTACK ON OPPONENTS

INSIDE AND OUTSIDE PARTY

SUMMARY: ADDRESSING ANNUAL TASMANIAN STATE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY (ALP) CONFERENCE, PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM FEBRUARY 23 CONTINUED ATTACK ON OPPOSITION LIBERAL PARTY WHICH HE HAD STARTED DURING PARLIAMENTARY SESSIONS WEEK BEFORE. EQUALLY UNDER ATTACK WERE UNNAMED LABOR PARTY COLLEAGUES WHO HAVE BEEN PUBLICLY CRITICAL OF HIS CONDUCT OF COUNTRY'S AFFAIRS. WHITLAM INCLUDED TRADE UNIONISTS WHO ARE RESISTING FEATURES OF HIS ECONOMIC POLICIES.

1. CONTINUING LINE WHICH HAS MARKED HIS PARLIAMENTARY AND PUBLIC SPPCHES SINCE ALP BIENNIAL CONFERENCE AT TERRIGAL EARLIER THIS MONTH, PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM ATTACKED BY NAME LIBERAL PARTY
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LEADER SNEDDEN, COUNTRY PARTY LEADER ANTHONY AND NEW SOUTH WALES

LIBERAL PREMIER TOM LEWIS, CHARACTERIZING OPPOSITION LEADERS AS "THUGS AND WRECKERS". WHITLAM SAID HIS OPPONENTS ARE OUT TO DESTROY ALP AND COUNTRY BY ANY MEANS AT HAND. CITING AS UNDER ATTACK FEATURES OF HIS GOVERNMENT'S SOCIAL PLANS FOR EDUCATION, HEALTH, TRANSPORTATION AND UNDERPRIVILEGED MINORITIES, WHITLAM SAID OPPOSITION FORCES "WANT TO MAKE AUSTRALIA SAFE FOR FANATICS, STATES RIGHTERS, REACTIONARIES, VESTED INTERESTS AND OVERSEAS COMPANIES WHO HAD IT SO GOOD FOR SO LONG".

2. IN OBVIOUS MOVE TO EXPLOIT LIBERAL INTRA-PARTY FRICTION, WHITLAM EMPHASIZED RECENT COUNTRY PARTY ATTEMPTS TO INVADE LIBERAL PARTY STRONGHOLDS IN TASMANIA; AND DISPUTE BETWEEN LIBERAL PARTY LEADER SNEDDEN AND LIBERAL PARTY PREMIER IN NEW SOUTH WALES OVER METHOD OF FILLING SENATE SEAT VACATED BY NEWLY APPOINTED JUSTICE LIONEL MURPHY. MOVING TO HIS OWN TROUBLES WITHIN THE LABOR PARTY, WHITLAM THEN HIT OUT AT WAGE DEMANDS PLANNED BY TRADE UNIONISTS WHO HAVE BEEN IGNORING HIS PLEAS FOR WAGE RESTRAINT. IN ATTEMPT TO REACH RANK AND FILE, WHITLAM AGAIN MADE PLEA TO WAGE EARNERS "TO EXERCISE RESPONSIBILITY".

3. MEDIA ON FEBRUARY 24 AND 25 CARRY NOT ONLY EXPECTED REACTION FROM OPPOSITION POLITICAL LEADERS ATTACKED BY PRIME MINISTER, BUT ALSO SHOW THAT TRADE UNIONISTS ARE LARGELY REJECTING PRIME MINISTER'S DIRECT PLEA TO THEM. STATEMENTS WERE QUOTED FROM SUCH WIDELY DIFFERING TRADE UNIONISTS AS CONSERVATIVE LAURIE SHORT OF FEDERATED IRONWORKERS ASSOCIATION (FIA), AND COMMUNIST LAURIE CARMICHAEL, FEDERAL ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF LEFT-WING AMALGAMATED METAL WORKERS UNION (AMWU). BOTH, WITH SOME INDIGNATION, ACCUSED WHITLAM OF "UNION BASHING" AND CALLED FOR A MORE EVENHANDED GOVERNMENT APPROACH TO GROWING INDUSTRIAL CRISIS.

4. COMMENT: LABATT FEELS THAT LAUNCESTON SPEECH SHOWS WHITLAM IMPROVING HIS ABILITY TO PUNCH MORE HOLES IN SIEVE WHICH HIS PARTY IS NOW BECOMING. IN HIS EFFORT TO REACH PUBLIC IN GENERAL AND TRADE UNION RANK FILE SPECIFICALLY, WHITLAM IS UNIFYING HIS OPPOSITION BY DRIVING HIS SUPPORTERS IN UNIONS AREA CLOSER TO INTRANSIGENT COMMUNIST-DOMINATED GROUPS.

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LAURIE SHORT, WHILE PRIVATELY LONG CRITICAL OF WHITLAM, HAS BEEN PUBLICLY ONE OF HIS SUPPORTERS. WHOLE PERFORMANCE, LABATT FEELS, UNDERLINES TRADITIONAL DILEMMA OF SOCIALIST GOVERNMENTS IN HANDLING TRADE UNION MOVEMENT ON WHICH THEY DEPEND. RESENTMENT AMONG MAJORITY TRADE UNIONISTS HERE HAS BEEN SIMMERING UNDER WHITLAM ABUSE FOR MONTHS, AND IS FAST APPROACHING FLASH POINT.

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